## THE GAS MOVEMENT IN THE FORTHCOMING PARLIAMENT.

Some of our contemporaries of the newspaper press, such as the *Liverpool Weekly News*, already quoted, and the *Bridgewater Times*, unquoted till now, but who, while also directing attention to the gas movement, as at length a national question for decision in the forthcoming Parliament, and at the same time freely doing us the credit to declare that "the public are greatly indebted to The Builder for the agitation of the gas question, which, despite the powerful opposition of the metropolitan gas companies, aided by their provincial monopolists, has been continued, till the kingdom, from one extent to the other, has rung with his alarums, and many of the companies have been frightened into something like consistent charges for the article they render to the public,"—have of late been "strenuously recommending" to their readers (as we ourselves, indeed, also did) the propriety of every constituency in the kingdom taking advantage of the present position of the gas investigation, and urging on those Parliamentary representatives who are about to issue forth from the impending general election (now more than *in medias res*) the necessity of seeing that the subject is thoroughly sifted and justice done. How far the constituencies have called for or will obtain such pledges as will be practically useful remains to be seen. But we would ourselves be inclined to place much less reliance on pledges than on the force of reason and fact upon the minds of the new members themselves, whether pledged or unpledged; to the end that one of the most rampant and "abominable monopolies and means of extortion with which this country has been or is inflicted" be forthwith effectually emasculated; and to that end we would—nay we *only can*—refer them, in the first place, to what has been already urged in the present volume of The Builder, in which alone this question has been systematically and originally argued as a question of disinterested public principle, the importance of which in the eyes of the companies themselves, and the conscious imminence of their peril, have recently, as our readers know, been very clearly evinced by the consequent appearance of an undisguised organ of monopoly, in the shape of a monthly periodical devoted exclusively to the interests of the companies that be against all that would henceforth compel them, by fair competition or otherwise, to renounce a portion of their *indeed enormous* gains.

But the attention, it now appears, of all and sundry the new members of Parliament has already been pointedly drawn to The Builder's efforts, although for a *very different purpose, or end*, to any ever contemplated by us, namely, not to the *destruction* of monopoly, but to the enforcement of a sort of *black mail* from its public plunder, in the shape of taxes for behoof of the revenue, to the amount of 2,000,000*l.*, out of one little corner of the monopolist free-profit-purse! A tax on the *light of day* we have long had, and a tax *on darkness*, in the place of it, has been only recently suggested; but here we have a tax on the only passable light wherewith to *enlighten our physical darkness!* Were such a tax eventually one on mere monopoly itself, as it is intended to be, it would be *unobjectionable*; but it would merely tend to perpetuate monopoly and to prevent the cheap diffusion of the best of all yet practicable substitutes for the light of day; and we are on various grounds opposed to it.

The author of this project is Mr. H. Fitz-Gerald, who enforces his idea by a calculation of the "enormous surplus profit in hand" amongst fourteen metropolitan companies, from whose annual surplus of 457,497*l.* he proposes to slice off the comparatively moderate tax of 1s. out of 6s. per 1,000 cubic feet of gas, a tax which, in this case alone, would yield 122,434*l.*; and in order to shew that such companies can afford to make gas at less than even 4s. 6d., he refers members of Parliament "to The Builder newspaper from January 29th, 1847," and to another calculation, given by himself, of the expenditure and receipts of the Imperial Gas Light and Coke Company, from which it appears, that when deductions to the amount of 61,543*l.*,—including 13,775*l.*, or 10 per cent., on the gross receipts of 137,757*l.* for all charges for the establishment,—6,887*l.*, or 5 per cent., for shareholders,—and 40,880*l.* for 51,100 tons of coals, at 16s. per ton,—are made from the gross receipts, which include 109,226*l.* for 364,088,500 cubic feet of gas, at 6s. per 1,000 feet; 3,832*l.* for 613,200 gallons of gas tar, at 1½d. per gallon; and 2,342*l.* for 562,100 gallons of ammonia, at 1d. per gallon,—there still remain of net receipts a sum of 76,213*l.*, leaving a surplus profit of 58,009*l.*, after deduction of the tax of 18,204*l.* "Bad debts," he very appropriately gives to the "breeze."

However accurate or inaccurate these calculations may be, the declaration that the companies "can afford to make gas at less than 4s. 6d. the 1,000 cubic feet" is undeniable; and be with great justice maintains, that "if their full consumption of coals were taken, which cannot be obtained without a parliamentary return, the surplus profit would nearly be doubled," even on the moderate estimate of the cheapness of price at which they could afford to make gas; on which interesting subject we have already thrown not a little light; and, for the sake of increasing that light even a little more, we will now add another and rather a striking instance of what is *practicable* elsewhere than in the metropolis, although it is only in such peculiar circumstances as those about to be adduced, that such little secrets of the gas-house happen, now and then, to come broadly and plainly out. The peculiarity of the circumstances alluded to might easily be guessed at, when it is considered, that if gas-works really do yield gas at an almost nominal price compared with what the companies charge for it, one would naturally expect, that in such cases as those of public institutions, which may happen, as a few of them do, to make *their own* gas, and make no secret of their accounts of cost and profit, the *secret* would inevitably *come out*. Now we have long been looking for just such a little secret, and, if we mistake not, out it seems to have come with a vengeance, if the *Leeds Mercury*, as quoted by the *Sheffield Iris*, is to be credited. It appears that at the Wakefield House of Correction the gas used *is made on the premises at 5½d. per 1,000 cubic feet!* To be sure that is "exclusive of servants' wages," and even in all probability of interest on outlay for apparatus and for repairs; but let us suppose that *Wakefield House of Correction* gas were sold to the public at 4s. 6d. (the *mitigated* price named by Mr. Fitz-Gerald, far less at 6s., the actual price demanded in the metropolis), to cover these expenses,—even in that case no less than about *ten hundred per cent.* beyond the actual cost of the gas so sold, would be saddled on the public, in order to cover the mere outlay for wages and repairs, and interest and dividends—or multiplicands or whatever such right royal returns deserve to be called! Now here is "a secret worth knowing." True, our metropolis does not stand in the midst of a coal field, but what of that? It seems to stand in the midst of what is vastly better,—namely, a mine of gold itself! And as for returns like these they ought to clear out the expense of carrying coals from the very antipodes, and that too ten times over, and plenty to spare. Well might Mr. Cox, a practical gas producer, say that companies in certain (or rather in *uncertain*) circumstances, *might* sell gas *with a profit* at 3s. 8d. per 1,000 cubic feet. (*a*) Yes, well they *might*, to oblige the public! And well might Mr. Cox, too, declare that he himself had supplied the Great Western Railway Company at Swindon with gas at 1s. 8d. per 1,000 cubic feet, and *did not lose by it.*" (*b*) Modestly spoken indeed! No wonder, moreover, that many manufacturers at Sheffield, "considering 2s. 6d. to be too high, manufactured their own." (*c*) And well, too, might a dividend of 5 per cent., with continued prosperity, occur at North Shields in the very face of a reduction from beyond 4s. per street lamp—which 'could not possibly pay,'—down all the way to 1*7*s., which did pay! (*d*) No wonder, in fine, that no metropolitan or other gas company cares to give a fair trial to Radley's patent, taken out in 1845, for the manufacture of gas from old bones or other offal at 5d. per 1,000 cubic feet!

The curious inference fairly deducible from all this, reminds us strongly of the contemptuous reply of an insolvent surgeon to a friend of our own, when congratulated on the profitable move he had made in establishing a company for the sale of drugs,—an article which was commonly understood to yield a profit of elevenpence in the shilling. "Elevenpence in the shilling!" responded the quondam Esculapius, with sovereign dignity, "Elevenpence in the penny you mean!

We have much more to add, especially with reference to the vast benefits in store for the public, in the endless diffusion of cheap gas, for heat and comfort, as well as for light and safety, throughout all the penetralia of domestic and municipal arrangements, *if their Parliamentary representatives only do their duty*; but we must defer the remainder till another opportunity, remarking only, in the meantime, that although the transfer of the main bulk of the enormous profits of the companies to the pockets of the public,—under deduction of no such extinguisher of our lights as darkness or the prevalence of blank walls and extinguished windows proves the tax on our light of day to have ever been,—would be a transfer that would fructify in the form of an immense diffusion of not only light but heat, to the more immediate and permanent benefit of the public themselves,—the frequent experience of Government in the compensatory benefits derived from immense reductions of taxation *on articles of general use*, ought to enlighten even those really blind leaders of the darkened public, the monopolists, to a knowledge of the assured fact, that they themselves would be equally and much more satisfactorily benefited by the substitution of *smaller profits, indefinitely multiplied* by the endless demand to which an immense reduction in the charges yet insisted on would inevitably lead, a demand which can only arise out of such a previous reduction of price, whether voluntary or by compulsion.*

(*a*) See p. 84, ante.
(*b*) See p. 83, ante.
(*c*) See p. 101, ante.
(*d*) See p. 340, ante.

* That gas companies do not clearly perceive how essential it is that the initiative in such a movement must be taken by them in large reductions of price, and not by the public in any previous increase of demand, is evident from the several right somewhat somewhat uttered by even those who are now beginning to open their eyes to the necessity and advantage of some such movement. Thus, for instance, does the Devonport company (or their recognised agent), to whom the public are indebted for setting an excellent example, already noticed in "The Builder," express what is conceived to be an obvious truth, and that, indeed, it is, in one sense, for it is more like the identical proposition whatever it is, than any thing else in the shape of sound inference. "That the demand for gas would be greatly increased if it became more generally used, there can be no doubt; and in proportion to the (prudent) increase of the consumption, so will it undoubtedly be in the power of the directors, from time to time, to lower the price of their gas, and thus render its use still further economical to the public."—[Pamphlet on the advantages to be derived from the general use of gas, &c.] Had it here been said "that the demand for gas would be greatly increased if its price were greatly reduced, there can be no doubt," there would have been some sense in this passage, and there the remainder would have stood legitimately founded on what went before; but, as it is, it is boyy-larry to all right interests and purposes. The "lowering of the price" ought to come *first*, and the "greatly increased demand," would be sure to follow.

† Viz., The Right Hon. Earl Cadogan, Sir Walter James, Bart., the Rev. G. Pocock, LL.B., Messrs. C. R. French, Rogers, and J. W. Archer.

## THE RETARDATION OF GLASS PAINTING IN ENGLAND.

### FREEMASONS OF THE CHURCH.

At a meeting of the Freemasons of the Church, held on the 10th instant, a committee was appointed to co-operate with certain other societies in adopting means to obtain and preserve Shakspeare's house.†

Mr. William Cave Thomas read a paper "On the Positive Science and Mathematical Principles involved in the Fine Arts," which we give elsewhere *in extenso*.

At a previous meeting reference had been made to the state of the painted window in Limehouse Church, which is so decayed as in many parts to shew the original surface of the glass.

In reply to an inquiry as to the cause of this, Mr. Wilmshurst read the following remarks:—"The simple answer would be, that the colours, instead of being vitrified, have been used in varnish, either entirely or partially. But as we cannot suppose any gentlemen or committee would sanction the outlay of a considerable sum of money to decorate a church, with the certain knowledge that in a few months it would become unsightly and defaced, exciting ridicule, instead of reverence, in the house of God, we must look further for the *cause*.

Some time since my attention was called professionally to the window of a neighbouring church, viz., Poplar. When I first went it had all the appearance of small streamlets of dirty water running over it, from top to bottom, and had so strange an effect (being a figure of Christ) that some of the parishioners said they would be content to pay handsomely for its demolition. Upon examination I found

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